

## Community Initiatives for Marine Resource Management GRENCODAs work - Beausejour

### GRENADA

#### Introduction

Coastal resource management issues cannot be addressed effectively by technocrats alone. To be sustainable, it is essential for persons living in coastal communities to be actively involved in and to take responsibility for the management of their coastal resources. The intervention of the Grenada Community Development Agency (GRENCODA) in Beausejour illustrates the role of an intermediary development agency as a catalyst for community based action. It demonstrates that effective community action requires commitment on the part of the facilitating/intermediary agency as well as on the part of the target community in order to achieve successful initiatives for sustainable development.

GRENCODA embarked on a project to work with selected coastal communities on the leeward side of Grenada to address issues which affected them. Thirteen communities were initially involved in the project.

Beausejour was the first target community and the one which responded most quickly to the GRENCODA initiative which came at a time when residents in the community were seriously concerned about coastal erosion. GRENCODAs intervention helped the community to become more aware of how unbridled sandmining, dumping of solid waste and lack of coastal conservation practices had led to the destruction of the coastline, the mangrove, the reef and consequently to a decline in fishing activities. Their collective action had dramatic results which encouraged the community to take greater responsibility for building a more sustainable future for themselves using resources of their ecosystems and environment.

The work of GRENCODA also highlights how the activity of an NGO can complement macro-policy initiatives. In the early 1990's, Governments of the OECS began to be more aware of the destructive impacts of beach sandmining and took an official policy stance

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in this regard. However, moving from policy statements to action for sustainable development often requires effective mobilisation at the community level as well as enforcement of pertinent legislation. This was GRENCODA's experience in Beausejour.

### **Background**

GRENCODA is a rural development organisation, committed to supporting people's initiatives for holistic, sustainable development through fostering self-reliance and community building. It is based in Gouyave in the parish of St. Johns on the western coast of the island. Although formally established in 1986, it evolved out of development initiatives of the 1970's - primarily the Pope Paul's Ecumenical Centre, aimed at stimulating community leadership and self-reliance. The programmes of the Centre stimulated and supported the growth of the NGO sector in Grenada, and are credited with providing technical guidance for the conceptualisation and implementation of some community based programmes of the Government of Grenada, during and after the period of the Grenada revolution (1979-1983).

GRENCODA's mission is to foster the holistic wellbeing of persons (primarily in rural communities in Grenada) by encouraging people's participation in and support for community based

initiatives to improve people's quality of life and to effect a more equitable income distribution in society.

### **Programme Outreach**

GRENCODA's target groups are mainly persons marginalised by society: adolescent youth, women, small farmers, small business-persons and the unemployed. Over the ten years of its existence, GRENCODA has worked with several communities in innovative development programmes, with four primary areas of activity:

***Community Enterprise Development*** which involves being a catalyst for a range of community initiatives, establishing a Legal Aid and Counselling Clinic.

***Training and Resource Development*** providing on the job training for women, facilitating work experience attachments for students and developing leadership skills at the community level.

***Small Enterprise Development*** involves providing financial, technical and management assistance to community based initiatives and co-operative enterprises.

***Research and Education*** through hosting public fora and discussions on issues of community, national, regional

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and international dimensions, as well as producing video documentaries and undertaking small research activities.

### **Structure and Focus**

An eleven-member Board guides GRENCODA. The day-to-day operations and programme implementation are carried out by a Secretariat of thirteen persons, eight of whom are located in Gouyave and five at a Legal Aid Clinic in St. George's, the capital of Grenada.

The agency has given a high priority to developing its capacity to deliver services and providing support to a rural clientele. GRENCODA has gained a high reputation for its programmes in the community, which have been highlighted in two evaluations conducted in 1990 and 1993. These indicated that:

*GRENCODA has been able to achieve a lot with limited financial resources and has emerged as one of the leading development agencies in Grenada. It is well respected in the Grenadian and regional community. In large measure, due to the credibility of its staff and its close links with communities, the urgent needs have been addressed. It has won hard-earned respect and*

*acknowledgment from Government officials, NGOs and by those groups that have benefitted from its work. As new conditions and problems arose, the organisation demonstrated an institutional flexibility to respond (Evaluation report 1993).*

### **Project Activities**

Increasing national awareness of environmental degradation caused by solid waste disposal practices, poor agricultural and fishing practices and sandmining, had led GRENCODA to examine the needs and concerns of coastal communities on the western coast of Grenada.

Within its community mobilisation activities, GRENCODA saw the need for a project for communities stretching from Grand Mal in St. George's to Duquense Bay in St. Mark's and covering some thirteen villages/communities. Funding was sought and received from the UNDP Global Environmental Facility (GEF) Small Grants Programme (SGP), the Natural Resource Management Unit (NRMU) of the OECS, and the French Mission in Grenada. The latter had a particular interest in the development of a marine park in the coastal area stretching from Moliniere Bay to Beausejour Bay. The

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Project's four components were intended to:

1. Raise consciousness about the need for better management of the environment and more positive environmental practices at the popular level - Public Education component.
2. Involve people directly in identifying the issues and concerns and how to address these - Consultations at village/ community level component.
3. Develop alternatives with persons now engaged in livelihood activities which threaten and despoil the environment - Case-Study/alternatives component.
4. Record and document the resources along the western coast - Inventory component.

The project was planned in two phases: Phase I was a series of consultation activities with each of the thirteen communities to enable them to identify their needs. It included an inventory of coastal resources and public education activities to encourage each community to accept responsibility for the management of its coastal resources.

An evaluation of Phase I led to Phase II, which was aimed at (i) addressing

problems, concerns and challenges which emerged from the community consultations and (ii) providing support for the development of income-earning projects based on more sustainable uses of local resources.

The GRENCODA initiative came at a time when some of the target communities were conscious of the need to take action to address the deterioration of the coastal waters. Beausejour was the first to respond.

### **Background to Beausejour**

Beausejour is a coastal village on the western coast of Grenada at the edge of an old sugar estate. It is closely associated with the Brizan Community which lies one mile to the north. The combined population of the two villages is one thousand and ten persons, 60% of whom are women. Beausejour and Brizan grew out of the sugar estate as typical low-income rural villages. With the demise of the sugar industry and closure of the rum distillery in the 1940's former cane cutters and estate workers sought a livelihood through fishing, primarily using seine-fishing methods.

Because of its location at the mouth of the Beausejour River, the village has traditionally been an excellent location for the collection and removal (for building purposes), of both sea and

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river borne sand. Up to the 1940's fishing was the main economic activity for the community. Sandmining was carried out on a small scale, mainly to supply domestic uses and to supplement the income of many families. For several years, this created no environmental problems, since the volume of sand removed was easily replaced by natural sea and river action. Ironically, the community benefited from the widespread erosion upstream in the Annandale River valley, where poor agricultural practices allowed rain to wash soil, gravel and sand down the river valley, depositing substantial amounts at the river bay mouth.

### **Growth of Sandmining Activities**

When concrete replaced wood as the preferred building material in the 1960's, there was an increasing demand for sand, and this fuelled small but thriving sandmining operations in the Beausejour Bay. Sandmining became a primary income earner, mainly for women who had limited economic options. Collection and piling of sand by the roadside for sale to the regular or itinerant consumer, became a major source of livelihood for many families and a source of economic sustenance for the community at large. During the 1960's the volume of sand mined was significant but, while profitable, was carried out at levels which were environmentally sustainable.

In the post-independence period of the early 1970's there was an economic upswing which engendered booms in the construction sector and accelerated the pace of sandmining activities. By 1985, the Government, through the Ministry of Works, had designated Beausejour as an official sandmining site. The small-scale sandmining activities of women were displaced by large-scale commercial activities. Removal of sand by the truckload replaced the modest piles of sand and was ten times the volume. Two thirds of the population of the community benefited economically, either directly or indirectly, from the lucrative commercial sandmining operations. Economic gains were being realised at a negative cost to the environment.



**Fig. 1 - Beach Erosion - Grenada**

### **Impact of Sandmining Operations in Beausejour**

When the demand for sand began to outstrip supply, the commercial sandmining operations moved closer and closer to the water's edge. As a result, the natural capacity of the river and sea

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to replenish the beaches was lost through the continuous ravaging of its sand resources. The impact was wide-ranging with almost a domino effect. At first, the coastline receded slowly, then rapidly, exposing huge boulders on the shore. Then the roots of coconut, almond and sea grape trees could no longer withstand the direct wash of waves and gradually succumbed, bringing proud, lofty tree trunks flat on the ground.

Wave action eventually tugged tree trunks and branches into the Bay and they provided cumbersome "anchors" or catchments for plastic and treacherous items, which snarled nets in the near-shore fishing areas. As a result, traditional seine fishing, the method used by many Beausejour fishermen, was made more difficult and became confined to a smaller and smaller area of uncluttered beachfront and near-shore waters. It eventually became almost impossible for them to fish in the Bay during certain periods of the year. The beachfront was also littered by stones, debris and logs from fallen trees, all of which prevented the natural build-up of sand on the beach.

The coastal and marine resources of Beausejour had become entangled in a web of environmental degradation. The sandmining operations also had other direct and indirect impacts. The waves broke closer and closer to the shore, finally undermining the coastal road

itself and even the foundations of some of the houses built on the shorefront, so that erosion of the beachfront had both ecological and direct social impact. Recreational activities of the community were affected since with the virtual disappearance of the beach, there was no place to play beach cricket, to have a picnic or to enjoy a comfortable sea-bath.

While some members of the community recognised the dangers of the sandmining operations and made informal protests to government authorities to have commercial sandmining stopped, the protests achieved little response. The destruction of the coastline became so severe that a retaining wall had to be built by Government, at great expense, to protect the western coast road. Only then was the destructive effect of the sandmining operations formally recognised. In 1990, the Government officially closed Beausejour as a sandmining site.

In 1993, when the OECS governments became concerned about the impacts of coastal erosion, a feasibility study was undertaken to examine sandmining operations in member countries. The sandmining activities in Beausejour Bay came under scrutiny and, not surprisingly, the study confirmed that sandmining was responsible for the high erosion rates in the Beausejour Bay. Among its many conclusions, the study showed that environmental degrada-

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tion does have an economic cost in the loss of valuable coastal resources, including fisheries, as well as in the need for compensatory expenditures such as retaining sea walls.

In spite of the official closure of sandmining in the Bay, the destruction continued. Private contractors and residents persisted in mining the valuable sand resource in Beausejour at reduced but still significant levels. They seemed unaware of the long-term devastation that was being reinforced. It was at this point that GRENCODA made its input to the Beausejour community through the Coastal Conservation Project.

#### **GRENCODA's Implementation Strategy**

A community facilitator was appointed by GRENCODA to manage the activities of the entire Coastal Resource Management and the Environment Project and to ensure that the communities were fully involved in identifying problems and solutions for the management of coastal resources. An inventory of coastal resources was undertaken; this highlighted the types of facilities, physical and social infrastructure, marine and land use activities in, and special characteristics of each community.

The Project was launched through individual discussions and community

meetings, where residents were able to identify issues about which they were concerned. In Beausejour, this consultation process highlighted 'pent-up' feelings about the changes in the Beausejour Bay. Residents were angry about the eroded shorefront and the debris lying on the beach and in near-shore waters. They recognised the dangers of illegal dumping in the Bay and of pesticide which runoff from poor agricultural practices in the surrounding hillsides. This poisoned fish and had led to a decline in the fish stocks. Most of all, there was anger about the excessive sandmining, some of which was being done by people from the community and which had led to the destruction of the beach, the road and the beach recreational facilities.

#### **Public Education and Consultation Process**

Several consultations were held with people from all sections of the community who came to 'air' their views about what had been done and what could and should be done to deal with the coastal erosion.

GRENCODA provided various inputs. It arranged for Fisheries Officers and other personnel to give information not only on the effects of the sandmining, but on the impact of typical practices, such as careless garbage disposal in the sea, which caused an accumulation of debris and was slowly killing the reef,

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the natural habitat for fish. GRENCODA also used a range of public education methods, including radio jingles and posters, which focused on solid waste disposal in the sea, as well as on protection of the beach and the fishing environment. Beausejour Bay was also featured prominently in a video on coastal degradation, which was undertaken by a sister NGO, the Agency for Rural Transformation (ART), in its attempt to build national awareness about coastal conservation issues.

The education thrust through consultations and individual dialogue made people aware of the impact that sandmining activities had on the coastline. Residents began to recognise the origin and causes of the visible and dramatic changes in Beausejour's coastline over the years. They understood better that the hardships faced by the seine and trawler fisherfolk were in part due to the unsustainable sandmining activities. Although these had brought economic benefits to the community, sandmining had also destroyed a major community resource and continued to threaten its fishing activities.



Fig. 2- Community clean-up on the beach - GRENADA

## Community Initiatives

The message was powerful. Its implications were clear. The Beausejour community decided that its first task was to organise a massive beach clean up to clear the beach and near-shore area of debris.

In May 1996, Beausejour residents, supported by GRENCODA, were able to arrange assistance for the beach clean-up from various companies and agencies. A major private sector construction company, Janin, provided heavy equipment to tow logs from the water and beach. The Government's Forestry Division provided chain saws to cut up logs. The community turned out in full force, providing hundreds of willing hands to comb the beach for logs, stones, branches and debris, which had inhibited the sea from its natural action of restoring the sand. Subsequently, the community stopped sandmining.

The visible results of cleaned and revitalised beach, galvanised the community into organising another step: a tree-planting exercise. First, the community cut down and burned trees which had been infected by the mealy bug. The Forestry Division then provided over one hundred seedlings of sea-grape, coconut and almond trees, which had been indigenous to that beach. Residents, old and young, turned out in full force to plant trees and celebrate the planting. The community

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also took steps to clear the mangrove and to restore the natural lake, and began to consider how this could be developed as a park for residents and visitors.

### **Successes and Achievements**

The impact of the community activities was dramatic. Within one year major physical changes had taken place on the beach. The sand had begun to accumulate, building back the beach and providing firmer ground for the young and older trees. Meanwhile, the seedlings grew quickly and the beach once more became alive with vegetation.

Consequently, the beach clean up resulted in the restoration of a stretch of beach wide enough to resume the playing of beach cricket.

Some of the intangible results of the public education and consultative process used by GRENCODA were equally significant:

- Residents indicated that the public education activities generated a high level of community awareness of environmental issues, which actually changed the approach of residents to dealing with their environment.

- The community was amazed at the changes that had taken place. They felt a tremendous sense of pride in their collective achievement in restoring the beach. Moreover, they had a better understanding of the concept of a Marine Protected Area.
- There were subtle changes in the way people viewed the beach, as they began to see it as a place of value, rather than as a dumping site.
- The community demonstrated a strong sense of ownership of the beach and became more protective toward maintaining it. Some of those who used to mine the sand now assumed the role of "beach cleaners." They became aggressively protective of the beach and would not tolerate removal of sand nor illegal dumping.
- Through the consultation process, women who had been involved in sandmining operations began to consider other options for economic activity, including fish processing and craft.
- On a wider scale, the collective action on the project was a stimulus for community organ-

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isation around other issues at a time when this had declined significantly in Grenada.

### **Constraints and Challenges**

In spite of a government policy about sandmining and an agreement to import sand for building from Guyana, the issue of sandmining remains a controversial one, since the cost of imported sand is likely to be high. There is general consensus that sand should not be mined for commercial construction. But where there is local and home owned construction, there are mixed feelings about having to pay for resources readily available at one's back door.

One of the greatest challenges faced by the GRENCODA community facilitator was the attitude of residents themselves, for although many residents recognised the problem of solid waste on the beach and the destructive impact of sandmining, many were reluctant to change the way they treated the beach. Many allowed their animals to roam on the beach, and these destroyed many of the young seedlings. **An** ongoing consultation process was required, at both individual and community levels, to counter the negative attitudes of many of the residents, especially those who had a stake in the sandmining operations.

It must be recognised that sandmining had been a major source of economic activity for many residents and, understandably, not all were pleased with efforts to eliminate it. The conflicts between the various stakeholders still have not been fully resolved. So, although sandmining in Beausejour has dramatically decreased, some sandmining activity continues surreptitiously, with bags occasionally being filled and carried away at night.

A major challenge was that of developing economic alternatives for the women and families that were directly affected by the end of sandmining activities. A group of these women was involved in planning activities for fish processing. However, GRENCODAs attempts to secure funding for this income-earning alternative have not yet been successful. The women have become discouraged since their own efforts to generate the required start-up capital have been unsuccessful.

The institutional capacity of GRENCODA was another constraint in Project implementation. Support was obtained only for one year for a facilitator to manage the entire project involving over thirteen communities. Once the Project ended, GRENCODA did not have the resources to continue the same level of activity and support to the various communities, including Beausejour. Community leadership has

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been able to maintain community interest and support for coastal conservation activities. However, periodic support from GRENCODA is still required to provide encouragement and technical advice.

The dilemma is a typical one faced by intermediary development agencies. On the one hand, agencies like GRENCODA must strive to be self-reliant in the face of declining external funding. On the other hand, they cannot effectively undertake catalytic development work in communities to promote sustainable development, if they themselves do not have core support to enable them to do so.

Financial resources were inadequate. Support from GEF/SGP, the French Mission and NRM was limited. Nonetheless, even though people in the community became enthusiastic, it was difficult to keep up the momentum of activities, while at the same time seeking support through the local private and public sector for these ventures. In addition, there were no contingency funds to undertake follow-up in a timely manner. So while the success of the Project in Ekausejour demonstrates the importance of catalytic interventions, it also indicates the need for a minimum level of ongoing support in order to address expectations that have been raised in the process.

## Lessons Learned

Environmental degradation can sometimes be halted and even be reversed if it is stopped early enough, before the point of no return, and is supported by both policy and community level initiatives. The Ekausejour experience provides hope to other community initiatives for environmental sustainability.

Communities are likely to mobilise around issues which have a direct impact on their livelihood. The degradation of the beach through sand-mining and poor waste disposal not only affected the beauty of the beach, but also had a direct impact on fishing, a major economic mainstay of the community, and the structural integrity of the coastal road. Once people understood the linkages between these, they were more prepared to support action which would promote the rebuilding of the beach. In order to be successful, initiatives require ownership by the entire community. If not, initiatives taken can be undermined. This was clearly demonstrated when people let loose animals and continued to mine sand.

Public education is central to community mobilisation for sustainable development. Leaders in Beausejour interacted with all families and residents in order to generate community support for activities. The time and effort spent

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on community meetings and individual discussions were essential for generating interest and support for treating the beach differently. In addition, the 'jingles' heard on national radio stations, as well as the posters distributed throughout the community' reinforced the message of communities taking responsibility to protect their own resources for their own future.

Environmental legislation is much more effective when the community understands the need for it and is willing to take steps to enforce it. This became abundantly clear by the steps the community took to protect the revitalised beach. GRENCODA's action demonstrated that collaboration between government and NGOs are not only possible but highly desirable. Community initiatives can be a stimulus to governments to play their regulatory and monitoring roles.

The linkage with and support from regional and international agencies was a key factor in the Project's success. Being able to access funds to employ a facilitator for the Coastal Conservation Project, enabled GRENCODA to undertake critical mobilisation and data gathering exercises, which would otherwise have been impossible with the existing staff resources. External funding and in-kind support from local firms also made possible the promotion of the coastal conservation message through the local media.

If agencies like GRENCODA are to continue their valuable work, their own capacity must be enhanced so they can organise and mobilise the community around issues that affect them. They also need to secure the resources to document the factors which affect the community's interest in this process, and processes like these, so that the lessons learned can be shared more widely.

While the success of the project in Beausejour demonstrates the importance of catalytic interventions through community efforts, and efforts of other agencies and government, it also indicates the need for a minimum level of ongoing and follow-up support to address expectations that have been raised in the process. Where they are designed to generate alternatives for community action, projects must include provisions for follow-up activities. In this regard, external agencies themselves need to be sensitive to these needs and should be encouraged to provide more 'sustainable' support to the developmental process.

### **Conclusion**

In a nutshell, the Beausejour experience provides an opportunity to observe firsthand the economics of promoting environmental sustainability. It vividly demonstrates the impact of environ-

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mental degradation on the economy of coastal populations through loss of fisheries and associated enterprises, as well as the necessity for coastal public works.

GRENCODA's experience in Beausejour is only one among many of its successful community interventions and is similar to the experience of many other intermediary agencies working at the community level. However, the Project in Beausejour highlights the challenge of how to balance the needs of the community with the use of natural resources (in this case sand), while at the same time ensuring that the resource is managed in a manner which will allow it to regenerate itself.

Finding solutions will require many inputs and a process of exploring opportunities that can satisfy the demands of community members for sustainable livelihoods. At the same time, there is need for a policy environment where government can

provide regulatory and technical support to control and monitor situations, but will still be sensitive to the needs of affected communities. It is within this context that intermediary agencies like GRENCODA can play significant roles as bridges between community needs and government policy frameworks, thus making a significant contribution to sustainable development.

#### **Recommendations**

**Developing natural policy frameworks to enable community action is an essential strategy for sustainable management of natural resources. It is therefore recommended that governments of the Caribbean put structures and systems in place to facilitate community based participatory natural resources management.**

**Footnote: At the time of printing it was learnt that approval had been given (Aug. 99) for sandmining. The community action to reverse this has resumed. Threats to sustainability are continuous.**